

Guide to Lake County's Property Tax and Budget

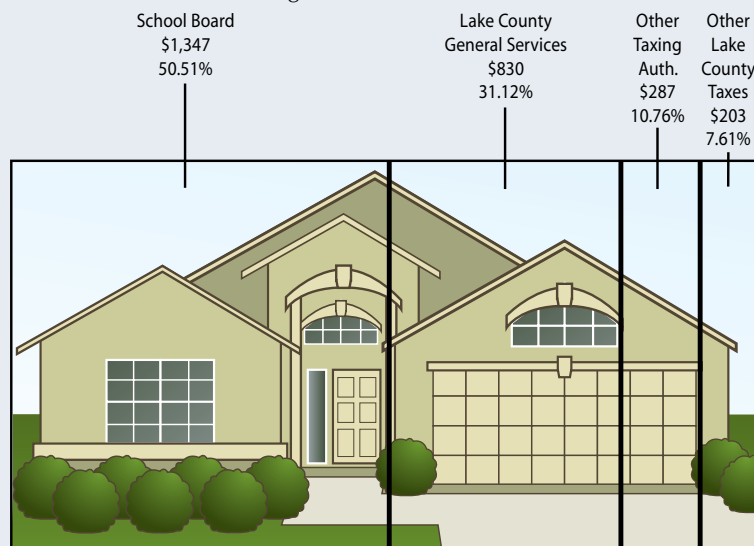


LAKE COUNTY
FLORIDA

Property Taxes

Q. What agencies benefit from property taxes?

- A. A property tax bill reflects many local government rates. The Lake County School Board is a separate taxing entity and levies a separate property tax rate to fund school operations. Other separate taxing entities include Lake County's 14 municipalities, Lake County Water Authority, St. Johns River Water Management District and the Southwest Florida Water Management District.



Total Tax Bill \$2,667

Q. What are property taxes used for?

- A. Lake County property taxes fund a myriad of important services. These include:
- Public safety operations, such as the jail, medical examiner, Sheriff, emergency management and animal services
 - Cultural and recreational services, such as libraries, parks, fairgrounds and Lake County Historical Museum
 - Offices of Property Appraiser, Supervisor of Elections and County Finance under the Clerk of Courts
 - Facilities for County Government and the Fifth Judicial Circuit
 - Functions of Growth Management, including development review and code enforcement
 - Economic Development functions to decrease tax burden of homeowners
 - Conservation and Resource Management including Mosquito and Aquatic Plant Management, Lake Soil and Water Conservation and the Horticultural Learning Center
 - Conservation of environmentally sensitive lands

Q. How much will Lake County Government's property taxes cost in 2008?

- A. Based on the proposed fiscal year 2008 millage rate, which County Commissioners could approve at the Sept. 18 meeting, total Lake County taxes for a homesteaded property assessed at \$200,000 would be \$1,033; a \$206 decrease from the previous year.

Taxes on a sample \$200,000 home

Assessed value of home (<i>often at lower than market value</i>)	\$200,000
Homestead exemption	\$25,000
Taxable value	\$175,000

Lake County taxes on a sample \$200,000 home	Prior Tax Year	New Tax	% of Total Tax Bill
Countywide ad valorem millage.	\$ 1,006	\$ 830	31.12%
Voter approved debt - environmentally sensitive land	\$ 35	\$ 35	1.31%
Ambulance and emergency services	\$ 93	\$ 81	3.03%
Stormwater, parks, & roads	\$ 105	\$ 87	3.27%
Total Lake County Taxes.	\$ 1,239	\$ 1,033	38.73%

Other Taxes

School Board taxes	\$ 1,338	\$ 1,347	50.51%
Lake County Water Authority	\$ 44	\$ 39	1.46%
Hospital District.	\$ 175	\$ 175	6.56%
St. Johns River Water Management District	\$ 81	\$ 73	2.74%
Total Other Taxes	\$ 1,638	\$ 1,634	61.27%
Total Tax Bill	\$ 2,877	\$ 2,667	100.00%

Q. How does the Property Appraiser assess properties?

- A. The Lake County Property Appraiser is charged with placing a fair and just value on each individual property in the County. Factors influencing value include property use, the size and condition of improvements on the site and the local real estate market. The Florida Constitution requires each property appraiser to assess property based on its market value. A simple definition of market value is the typical price a willing buyer would pay to a willing seller. It is important to remember that a property appraiser does not create value. People create value by buying and selling real estate in the open market place. A property appraiser has the legal responsibility to study those transactions and appraise a property accordingly.

Q & A Property Tax Reform

Q. How did the recent property tax reform affect homeowners?

- A. State mandated property tax reform required all local governments, with the exception of school districts, to reduce tax revenues up to 9 percent, excluding growth-related tax dollars. In Lake County's case, the reduction in property taxes for a sample \$200,000 home with a homestead exemption would be about \$206.

Q. How did recent property tax reform affect Lake County Government services?

- A. Lake County met the reduction required by the state. For fiscal year 2007-2008, property tax revenues are expected to decrease by about \$2.8 million in the general fund and \$260,000 for stormwater, parks and roads. To absorb the tax reduction and increases in fuel prices, employee health insurance and other commodities, it was necessary for Lake County to trim some services out of its 2007-2008 fiscal year budget. Some of these services included:

- Downloadable audio books, DVD and other library materials
- Some bus trips for transportation disadvantaged
- Citizen newsletter
- Maintenance of facilities, infrastructure and equipment
- Grant funding for items such as children's advocacy groups, social services and health services
- Reduced hardship assistance for special assessments
- Professional development
(*training, travel for conferences, dues, memberships and subscriptions*)

Q. How is the Lake County budget adopted?

- A. The budget process begins in February as directors begin compiling their individual budgets and submitting requests to the Office of Budget. The Board of County Commissioners reviews the County Manager's proposed budget at July and August work sessions. After changes and amendments, the budget is adopted at public hearings in September.

Q. How much does property tax fund of the total County budget?

- A. Property tax funds about 48 percent of the Lake County budget. While property tax is the largest source of revenue, others include:

- Gas Tax: Used to maintain and build roads, bridges and sidewalks. In Lake County, each gallon is taxed a total of 47.3 cents. The federal share is 18.4 cents, state share is 21.9 cents and the County imposes 7 cents.
- Sales Tax: Lake County's sales tax is 7 percent. Of the first 6 cents, the state receives 5.5 cents and the County's share is one-half cent, which goes to general fund operations. Lake County voters approved an additional 1 cent to fund infrastructure of which one-third goes to the cities, one-third goes to schools and one-third goes to the County.
- Impact fees: Transportation, school, library, fire and parks impact fees are charges assessed by Lake County against new development projects that attempt to recover the cost incurred by providing the public facilities required to serve the new development.

Q. What service improvements are in the proposed 2007-2008 budget?

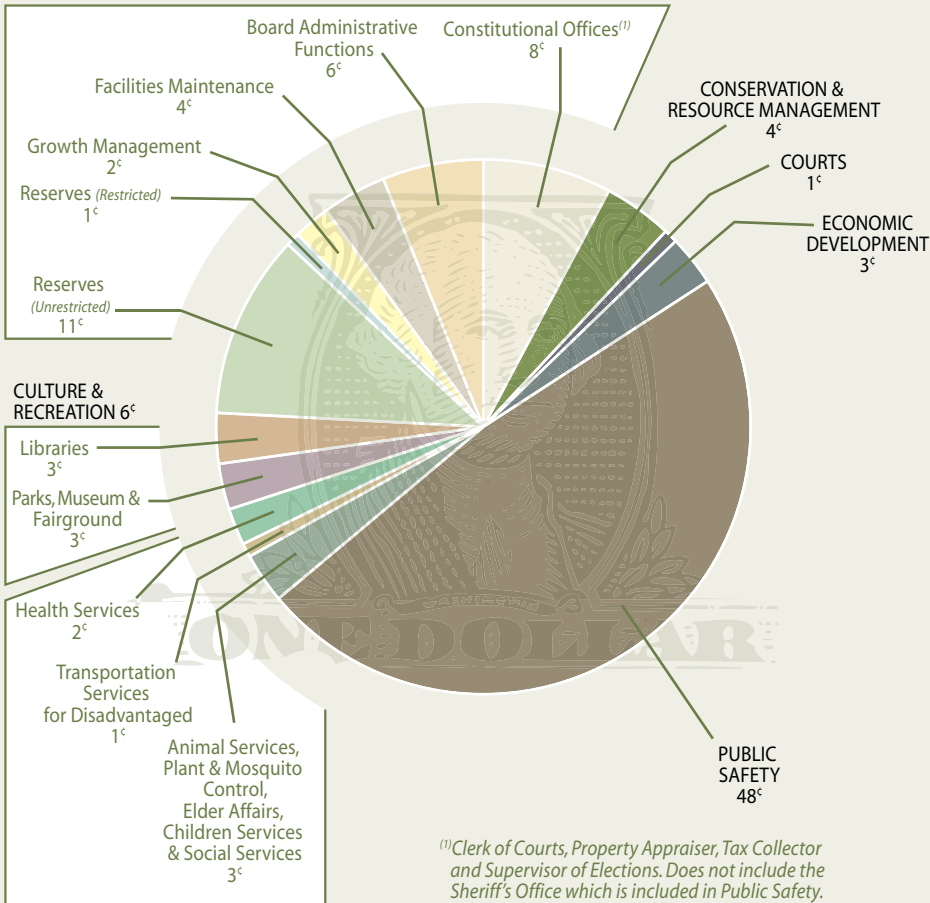
- A. The proposed 2007-2008 fiscal year budget focuses on critical needs: public safety. Some of the service additions include:
- Twenty-five positions (including 21 deputies) for the Sheriff's Office
 - Twelve positions for the opening of a new fire station on County Road 561
 - Two positions to support the anticipated completion of the countywide public safety radio system

County Budget

Q. What do I get for my general fund tax dollar?

A.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT 32¢



HEALTH & WELFARE 6¢

CULTURE & RECREATION 6¢

Libraries 3¢
Parks, Museum & Fairground 3¢
Health Services 2¢
Transportation Services for Disadvantaged 1¢
Animal Services, Plant & Mosquito Control, Elder Affairs, Children Services & Social Services 3¢

Save Our Homes

Q. What is Save Our Homes?

A. In 1992, Florida voters approved an amendment to the state constitution, which protected existing residents from massive property value appreciation. Known as "Save Our Homes," the amendment capped annual property assessments for any homeowner qualifying for the homestead exemption. The cap limits annual property assessment increases to 3 percent or the percentage change in the consumer price index, whichever is less.

Q. How does a Lake County resident qualify for Save Our Homes?

A. To qualify for Save Our Homes, a residential property must already qualify for the \$25,000 homestead exemption. A homestead exemption is available to every person who has legal title to a residential property and lives there permanently. The person must be a permanent resident of Florida on Jan. 1 of the initial application year. Either the person may apply at the Lake County Property Appraiser's Office by mail or in person at any time through the year but the deadline is March 1 of the qualifying year.

Q. What happens to Save Our Homes when a home is bought or sold?

A. When a homestead property sells, the Save Our Homes cap is removed and the value is increased to market value Jan. 1 of the following year. This reassessment can result in a dramatic increase in the tax bill, even when the local government's tax rate remains the same or is decreased.

Q. Are there other exemptions available?

A. State law entitles homeowners to apply for an additional exemption as a widow or widower. Certain specified medical disabilities may also qualify for an additional exemption. In addition, residents 65 and over whose adjusted household income complies with state law may apply for a senior's exemption. In 2007, the Board of County Commissioners approved an ordinance to increase the homestead exemption for low-income elderly from \$25,000 to \$50,000. Unlike the homestead exemption, this exemption applies only to the property taxes levied by the taxing authorities, which have authorized this exemption. The filing deadline for all these exemption applications is March 1.



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This brochure was developed to help explain to citizens the nuances of annual property value assessments and the Lake County budget. For more information about either of these topics, log on to www.lakecountyfl.gov and visit the Lake County Property Appraiser's or the Lake County Office of Budget's Web sites.